

Guelph Culture: Everywhere. Everyday. Everyone.

Culture Plan 2030

Community Engagement and Research Report

October 2023

Policy Alignment

Culture Plan 2030 takes inspiration from [A United Vision: Guelph's Community Plan](#) and is guided by [Future Guelph Strategic Plan 2024-2027](#).

In addition, the Culture Plan aligns with:

- [Official Plan](#)
- [Economic Development and Tourism Strategy](#)
- [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#)
- [Community Investment Strategy](#)
- [Cultural Heritage Action Plan](#)

Culture Plan 2030 will inform [Guelph Museums & Culture Strategic Operating Plan](#).

Trend Alignment

Climate Change: Guelph is committed to the United Nations “Race to Zero” campaign and has set targets for the community to reduce carbon emissions. Culture has an opportunity to contribute to achieving these targets through sustainable practices and public education.

Digital shift and social creator economy: With growth in digital platforms and emerging content creation, creators in Guelph - located on the Toronto-Waterloo tech corridor – are well positioned to foster new digital offerings.

COVID recovery: Creative industries, museums, libraries, sport and recreation, and tourism were among the first hit by the pandemic. As the impacts of the pandemic ease, there is opportunity to re-set and revitalize the sector.

Affordability: Cost of living and availability of affordable housing are community challenges which are impacting the ability of artists and culture workers to live and work in Guelph. As a result, we are losing creative workers to communities like Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto.

Equity and inclusion: Largely due to immigration, the cultural composition of Guelph is becoming more diverse. It is essential that Culture Plan 2030 addresses the equity and inclusion needs of diverse culture contributors and audiences.

Population increase: Guelph continues to experience a consistent level of managed growth, with a projected population of 169,000 by 2030. This City needs to consider optimizing current culture assets while planning for development of additional assets to meet the needs of a growing population.

Community Engagement

Guelph Museums & Culture worked with the Community Engagement team to compile previously- collected local culture sector data with new information and ideas generated from a diverse range of community members.

Engagement goals

- To understand the various iterations that culture takes through an array of individuals, backgrounds, histories, organizations, and ways of expression that make up the cultural landscape in Guelph.
- To gather feedback, stories and data that can be used to finalize a plan that supports culture in all these iterations, one that reflects and honors the vision, feedback and needs expressed by identified audiences across Guelph with a vision toward 2030.

Engagement objectives

Nurture relationships

- Strengthen existing relationships through collaboration with culture leaders
- Seek out community champions
- Meet people where they are at by attending and engaging at community events and in studio spaces catering to equity-deserving groups
- Encourage networking and co-creation among workers in the culture sector

Build Capacity

- Use plain language, translation, and options for various levels of involvement to encourage participation from a broad range of audiences
- Provide and share background information with participants to encourage more informed engagement participation

Ensure meaningful opportunities to influence the Culture Plan

- Clearly identify what has already informed the Culture Plan
- Use different approaches to prompt and gather feedback to ensure a robust understanding of community sentiment
- Create space for voices that are not often heard in municipal decision-making by seeking out opportunities to connect and listen to equity-deserving groups in safe and brave spaces

Connect the Dots

- Culture Pulse Check meeting (2018)
- A United Vision: Guelph's Community Plan engagement (2018)
- Create, Play, Stay – Culture and Sport Tourism Plan engagement (2022)
- Culture Leaders meetings (2023)
- Have Your Say online portal activities and survey (2023)

- Activities at Multicultural Festival, Art on the Street, and Guelph Civic Museum (2023)
- Conversation Cafés (2023)
- Indigenous Sharing Circle (2023)

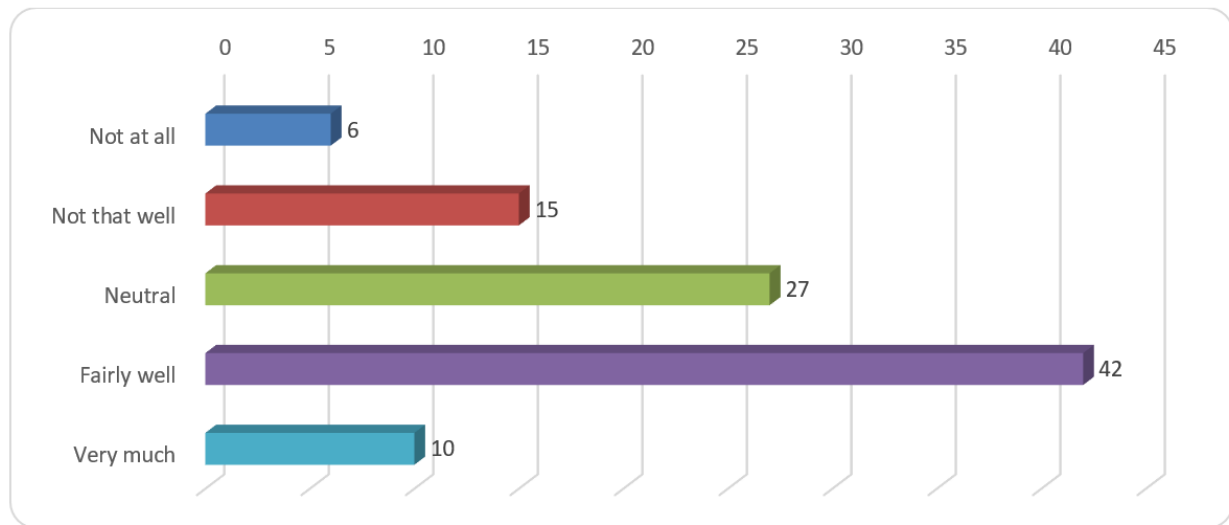
Culture Plan 2030 Survey Results

Online Survey Respondent Profile

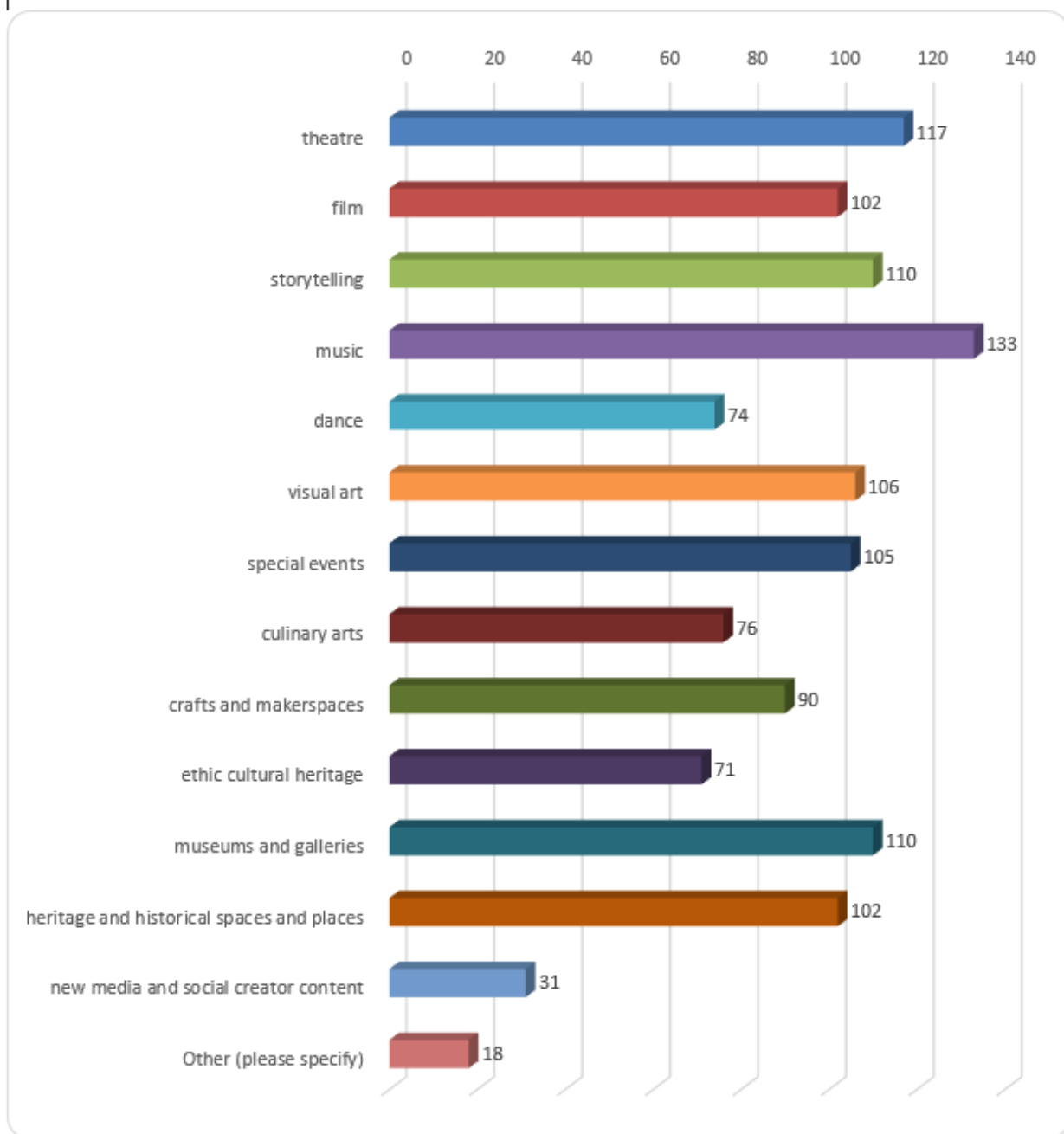
- Place of origin: 94 percent of respondents live in Guelph and 6 percent live elsewhere including Fergus, Waterloo, Sarnia, Brantford, Bayfield, and Toronto.
- Ages: 35 to 44 years (24 percent); 45 to 54 years (20 percent); 25 to 34 years (17 percent); 65 to 74 years (14 percent); 55 to 64 years (13 percent); 75+ years (9 percent); <25 years (3 percent)
- Annual household income: \$50,000 to \$100,000 (29 percent); \$150,000+ (19 percent); Prefer not to answer (18 percent); \$100,001 to \$150,000 (15 percent); \$25,001 to \$50,000 (13 percent); <\$25,000 (6 percent)
- Ethnic background of respondents in relation to the demographic profile of Guelph.

Ethnic Background	Guelph Demographic (Percent)	Respondents (Percent)
European Origins	76	73
Black	4	3
Latin American	1	1
South Asian	7	2
Southeast Asian	2	1
West Asian	2	1
East Asian	6	0
Indigenous	1	1
Intersectionality	0	3
Not provided	0	16

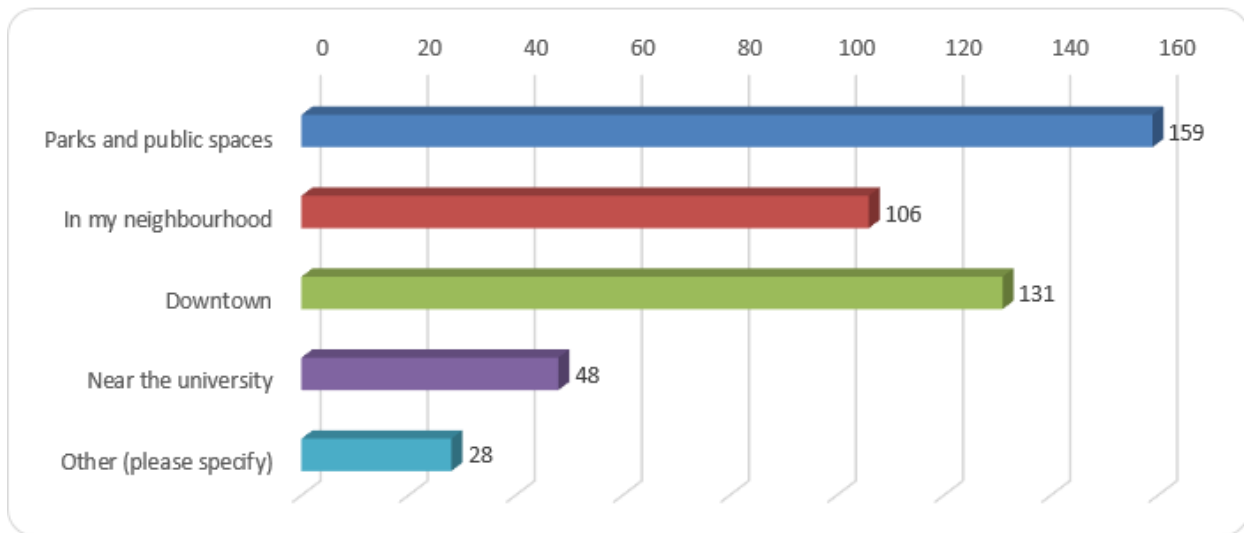
To what extent do you see yourself reflected in culture activities in Guelph?



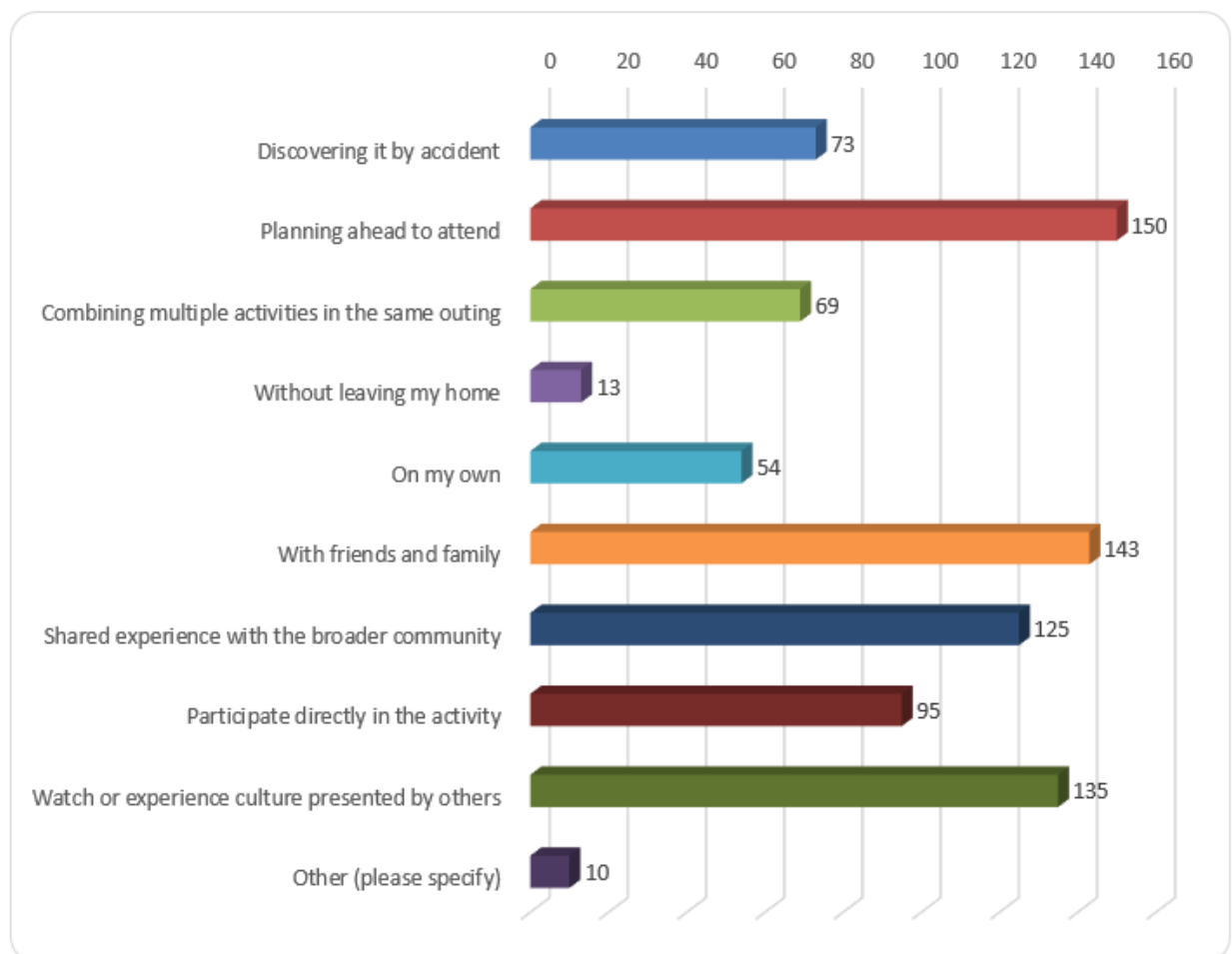
What kind of culture activities do you enjoy?



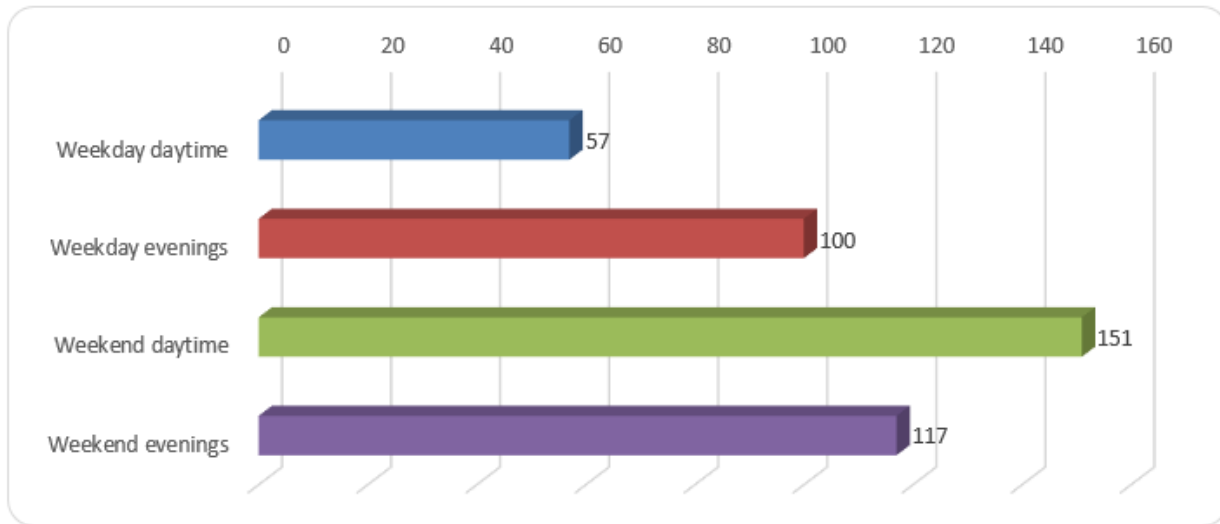
Where would you like to experience culture?



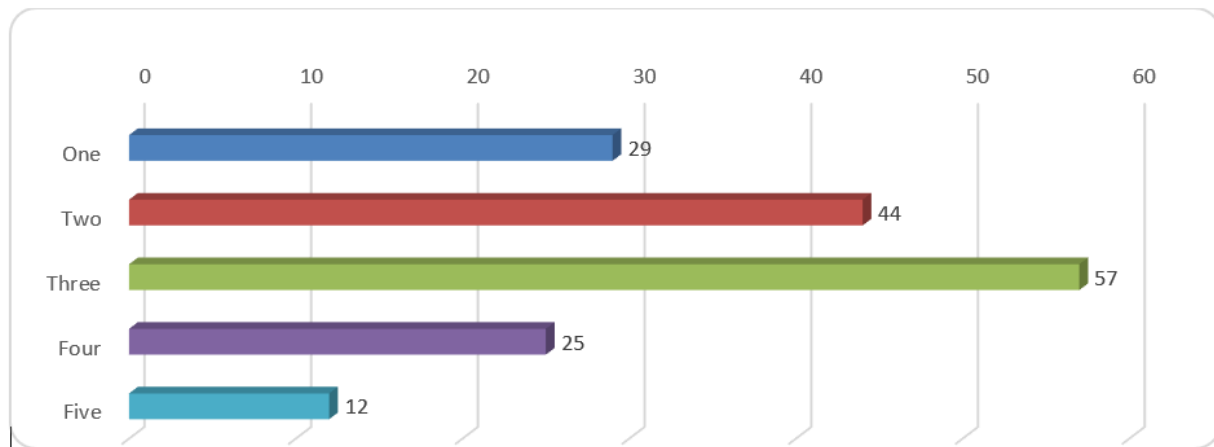
How do you want to experience culture?



When would you most likely want to experience culture activities?



When compared to spending on all City activities, where would you place spending on culture? Select one for your highest priority and five for your least.



Current state of culture in Guelph

Through community engagement, this is what we heard from the culture sector and local citizens:

Strengths

Cultural vibrancy, built from the grassroots up

Guelph has a deep-rooted reputation as a hub for cultural activity – from music, dance and theatre to literature and poetry, to sculpture, painting, and craft, to galleries and festivals, Guelph is known and respected for its creative people, welcoming and engaged audiences, and committed volunteers.

Guelph is home to many cultural events and facilities, including Hillside Festival, Guelph Jazz Festival, Guelph Dance Festival, Guelph Studio Tour, Art Gallery of Guelph, River Run Centre, Guelph Youth Music Centre, Guelph Civic Museum, and McCrae House National Historic Site.

Guelph also boasts a rich intangible cultural heritage with values, traditions and identities that have evolved over generations, and make Guelph “so Guelph.”

Located at the heart of southwestern Ontario, close to Toronto

Guelph is situated 90km from Toronto and 25km from Kitchener/Waterloo, providing local artists access to significant markets, resources, and audiences, and providing regional audiences access to Guelph talent.

Nurtured by nature

Positioned at the convergence of two rivers, on land that was valued hunting ground and gathering place for First Nations before forests were converted into fertile agriculture fields, Guelph values the nature that envelops the city, embracing parks and green spaces, exploring trails and rivers, and making environmentally conscientious choices. Influenced by local agriculture innovation and surrounded by food-generating fields, Guelph has a strong farm-to-table tradition which supports a delicious culinary scene, accompanied by breweries, distilleries, and cannabis dispensaries.

Historic downtown with modern urban conveniences

Downtown Guelph is a distinct and vital urban centre nestled against the Speed River, comprised of beautiful heritage buildings and public spaces, and surrounded by leafy neighbourhoods, where people live, work, shop, dine, play, and celebrate.

Downtown Guelph is the cultural and civic hub for the City, anchored by museum and heritage sites, performing art centres, a farmers’ market, public art installations, and public gathering spaces. It will be further strengthened with the

building of the new Central Library and the establishment of the Conestoga College downtown campus.

Attracting and keeping emerging talent through higher education

The City of Guelph is home to one of Canada's top universities, the University of Guelph (est. 1864) with approximately 30,000 students. Well known as Canada's Food University, boasting the Ontario Veterinary College, Ontario's Agricultural College, and Macdonald Institute, the University of Guelph also has a notable College of Arts, with Humanities and Fine and Performing Arts programs.

The Conestoga College campus in Guelph is a provincial leader in education and training for the motor power trades including automotive, truck and coach, heavy equipment, recreational vehicles, and motorcycles. The college campus also provides business-oriented programs, including Business Foundations, General Business and Office Administration as well as academic upgrading and career-focused programs.

Weaknesses

Perceived lack of financial investment

Guelph's municipal investment in culture is perceived to be inadequate as art and heritage organizations indicate a gap between ambition and capacity.

No space

There is lack of affordable space to create, rehearse, perform, and exhibit, and a perception that some creative spaces such as the River Run Centre and Farmer's Market are underutilized.

Inadequate event infrastructure and red tape

Availability and affordability of downtown parking is seen to be a problem, exacerbated when event schedules collide. Likewise, limited access to staging, lighting, electrical service, and washrooms in public gathering spaces has been a limiting factor for event organizers. The lack of film and music offices is perceived to limit potential, and some City policies and processes are seen to be excessively restrictive.

Long, cold, dark winters

The winter months are under-programmed.

Silos

Despite the abundance of cultural activity in Guelph, the culture ecosystem appears to be fragmented. There is inconsistent and infrequent communication and collaboration amongst the culture community. There is a disconnect between the culture community and the University of Guelph and its student body, representing a lost opportunity in terms of audience and talent development. There is inadequate

recognition and engagement of equity-deserving community members. There is not a central calendar or consistent cross-promotion practices.

Opportunities

Sing from the same song sheet: work together, strategically

This Culture Plan is viewed as an opportunity to set the stage for collaborative approaches to planning, programming, and promotion. Players in the cultural sector would like to get to know each other better through mixers, meetings, conferences, and fam tours. When we know each other better, we can support each other better, through cross-promotions, collective web presence, shared spaces, and equipment, and perhaps even a one-stop Culture Calendar.

There is strength in working collaboratively within the sector to support creative industries, such as film and music; and to seek designations such as UNESCO Creative Cities Network. There is also benefit to working with aligned sectors, such as Education, Recreation, Tourism, Economic Development, Downtown Business, and Food and Beverage, to open new doors to product and audience development.

Finally, connecting with regional, provincial, national, and international networks to explore culture trends and learn from comparator municipalities will contribute to local knowledge and success while advancing Guelph's profile and reputation.

Cultivate relationships

Representation matters. Cultivating relationships with equity-deserving communities within Guelph will expand our knowledge, experiences, and networks in new and exciting ways, and will ensure everyone is included in the local cultural milieu.

Spotlight success

The community is craving tangible acknowledgement of cultural achievements through recognition opportunities, annual awards, and provincial, national, and international designations.

Emerging spaces

New facilities on the horizon, including the new Central Library, the South End Community Centre, the Guelph Arts Council artBar, a new pottery studio and art-making space at the West End Community Centre, could help to fill some of the culture space gaps in the community.

We should also be considering the cultural potential of sites primed for development and adaptive reuse including the Drill Hall, Ontario Reformatory, and former St. Agnes School, as the community seeks affordable indoor venues, with capacity for 100 to 600 people, to enjoy performances, exhibitions, events, and hospitality.

Innovative solutions

We are called to apply Guelph innovation to parking mitigation strategies, including mindful scheduling of events, shuttle services, and bike-friendly events and sites. We are asked to consider creative solutions to fill gaps between demand for space and allocation of space. We are inspired to create way-finding and placemaking strategies and installations that reflect Guelph's vibe.

Capacity building

Consider the City's role in the cultural ecosystem as a catalyst, enabling the sector to thrive with strategic financial investment, flexibility in use of space, and removal of barriers. Consider culture grants that enable creators to take risks in launching new initiatives. Explore new sources of funding, such as Community Development Charges, that increase capacity for the sector beyond what is possible within tax-funded allocations.

New experiences

The bicentennial in 2027 is eagerly anticipated to be a seminal moment for cultural expression and celebration. As we plan for this pivotal milestone, we should also be exploring the use of technology to advance cultural experiences through apps and digital engagement. We should also be generating winter programming to address seasonal gaps in cultural experiences.

Threats

Unaffordability

Unaffordable housing, rising cost of living, and increasing operating costs are threatening the viability of the creative class to live and work in Guelph. Artists are leaving Guelph for work opportunities, and for more affordable communities.

Social challenges

It has been a difficult few years for all of us. As the community recovers from COVID-19, we continue to grapple with impacts of mental health, addiction, and homelessness, leading to concerns about individual and community safety and security.

Contraction of culture

The cultural sector seems to be shrinking, from smaller audiences at shows to loss of culture spaces to the pause/elimination of Arts and Humanities programs at the University of Guelph.

Red tape

The poster by-law, unreasonable health and safety restrictions, noise restrictions are seen as barriers to creativity and cultural engagement.

Fatigue and frustration in sector

People are tired and are looking for action rather than more talk and consultation.

Investment in Culture

Total Culture Cost per Capita

This measure represents the total cost of providing cultural services including grants and the funding of cultural venues, e.g. art galleries, historical sites, cultural centres and museums per person. Guelph data is extracted from 2021 budget actuals. Comparator municipality data is provided by Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada 2021 Culture Performance Measurement Report.

1. Hamilton	\$29.79
2. Calgary	\$29.02
3. Guelph	\$26.24
4. Sudbury	\$24.27
Median	\$22.94
5. London	\$22.94
6. Regina	\$18.35
7. Winnipeg	\$ 9.29
8. Windsor	\$ 7.41

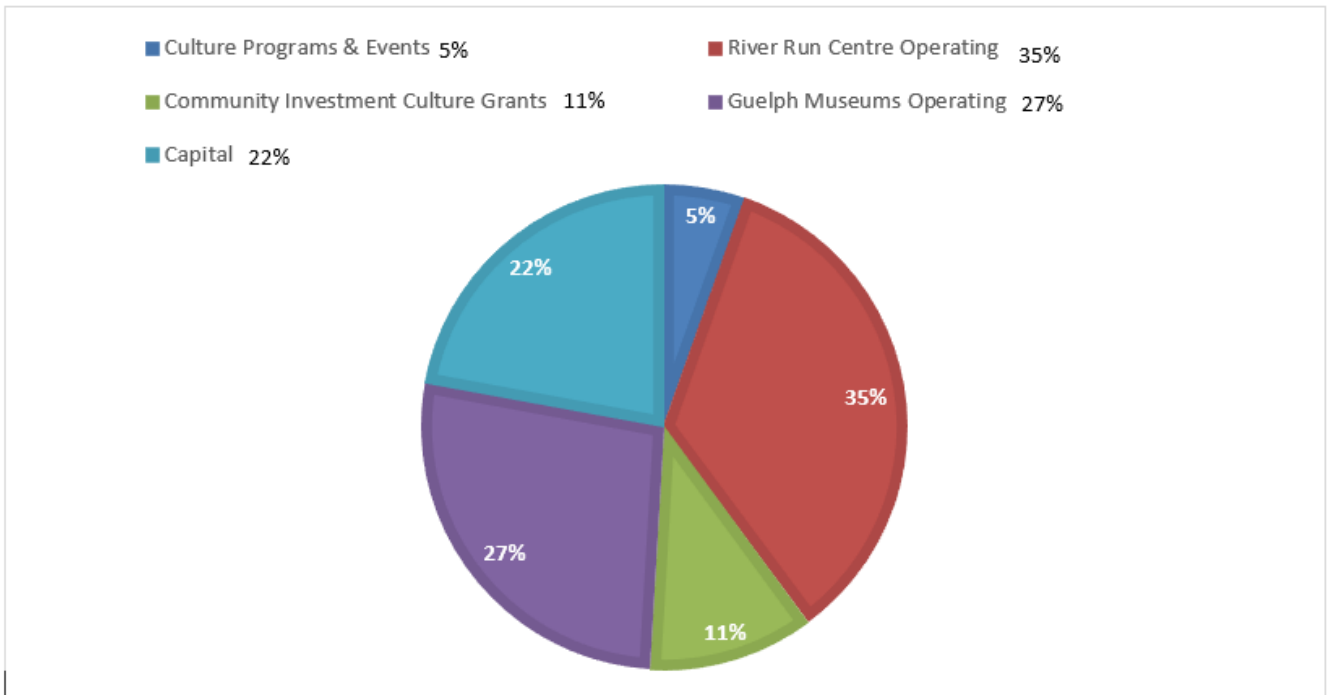
Culture Grants per Capita

The measure represents the funding dollars provided for Arts, Heritage and Festivals grants only. The direct municipal investment in arts funding is relative to a city's service delivery model, size of its arts community and its funding envelope. For example, some municipalities provide funding to their "anchor" organizations, e.g. art gallery, community auditorium, theatre and symphony through grants versus municipally owned/operated facilities.

1. Calgary	\$14.55
2. Winnipeg	\$ 8.23
3. Sudbury	\$ 7.99
Median	\$7.18
4. Regina	\$ 7.18
5. Hamilton	\$ 5.71
6. London	\$ 4.98
7. Guelph	\$ 2.91
8. Windsor	\$ 1.49

2021 Guelph Culture Investments

The City of Guelph invests in culture through municipally owned/operated facilities capital and operating, municipally presented events and programming, and community investment grants to culture organizations. In 2021, the City of Guelph spent a total of \$3,555,225 on culture.



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Acknowledgements

Culture Plan 2030 is a result of input from many community members, including culture contributors, residents, and City staff. Their ideas shaped the themes and recommendations presented in this plan.

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Colin Harrington	Musician
Damian Weston	Guelph Arts Council
James Gordon	Musician
Jeremy Luke Hill	Vocamus Writers Community
Michelle Peek	Art Not Shame
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Samantha Zimmerman	Guelph Youth Music Centre
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